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## **A Proposed Land Use Policy Framework for the San Francisco Bay Area**

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**Adopted by the Executive Board of the Association of Bay Area Governments**

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Many citizens in the Bay Area have noticed that their quality of life has deteriorated in recent years. People are becoming increasingly aware of problems such as:

- traffic congestion
- cost and supply of housing
- loss of open space and agricultural land
- air and water quality and other environmental concerns
- deterioration of infrastructure
- inequities in economic opportunities and uncertainty about the region's economic future

All of these problems have significant effects on the physical and social welfare of our communities. Many of them are interrelated, and the result of haphazard regional growth patterns. The real dilemma is not that these conditions exist, but that they are largely unresolvable by our present structure of decision-making, which does not contain policies or procedures for handling issues of regional significance. Recent interjurisdictional cooperation and coordination efforts are a step in the right direction. The problems, however, are getting worse. A more comprehensive effort is needed.

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## Guiding Principles

The Association of Bay Area Governments believes that local governments must find a way to balance local self-determination with effective subregional and regional policies and decision-making. In view of the Legislature's current interest in local growth management and regional institutions, it is far better to develop our own common vision and interjurisdictional approach to decision-making within the Bay Area than to have unilateral actions dictated by the State of California.

Finally, the policy framework recognizes that existing fiscal constraints and motivations have influenced many land use decisions, and it suggests actions and programs to improve revenue generation and cost sharing.

### Proposal Overview

The Association of Bay Area Governments proposes the establishment of a policy framework for future land use decision-making in the Bay Area. This framework respects the need for strong local control and recognizes the importance of regional comprehensive planning for items of regional significance.

**A city-centered concept of urban development is advocated**, with balanced growth guided into or around existing communities in order to preserve surrounding open space and agricultural land, as well as environmentally sensitive areas.

The proposed framework will reduce public costs by encouraging a more efficient use of existing and future infrastructure.

Subregional coordination is encouraged to facilitate the resolution of interjurisdictional land use issues and to realize regional, and local objectives.



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## Policies and Actions

While recognizing that there are numerous growth-related issues that could be addressed in any new approach, the Committee elected to develop a discrete set of policies aimed at the most critical land use issues confronting the Bay Area.

### Policy One

**Direct growth where regional infrastructure capacity, such as freeway, transit, water, solid waste disposal and sewage treatment, is available or committed, and where natural resources will not be overburdened.**

#### Objectives

- Maintain adequate performance standards and levels of service throughout the region.
- Focus on maintenance and use of existing and planned infrastructure.
- Discourage sprawl development.
- Conserve energy, land, water, and other resources.
- Preserve agricultural land, open space, and environmentally sensitive areas.

#### Actions

- A. Cities and counties shall designate vacant or underused land with available infrastructure for higher intensity use in their general plans.
- B. Cities and counties shall conserve, rehabilitate, and/or redevelop, where appropriate, existing urban areas.
- C. Cities, counties and special districts shall discourage significant infrastructure extensions beyond urban growth boundaries.

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## Policy Two

Encourage development patterns and policies that discourage long distance automobile commuting and increase resident access to employment, shopping and recreation by transit or non-auto means.

### Objectives

- Improve air quality.
- Conserve fuel.
- Reduce traffic.
- Increase time spent with family.

### Actions

- A. Cities and counties shall evaluate current needs, and projected population and employment growth, and modify land use policies and categories where necessary to balance future employment and housing.
- B. Cities and counties shall encourage employment and housing in proximity to transit stations.
- C. Cities and counties shall ensure that non-transit accessible employment improves job/housing balance within the community or subregional area.
- D. All public agencies shall support telecommuting opportunities.
- E. Cities and counties shall encourage employment that provides jobs for existing local residents.

## Policy Three

Establish firm growth boundaries for the urban areas of the Bay Area. Direct and permit urban development only within these growth boundaries.

### Objectives

- Recognize the significant investment in parks, open space, wildlife and watershed lands.
- Preserve open space and agricultural land.
- Protect environmental resources.
- Provide greenbelts between communities.
- Encourage more efficient use of land and infrastructure.
- Control sprawl while providing reasonable, predictable opportunities for development within the growth boundaries.

### Actions

- A. Cities and counties shall develop long-range plans to accommodate population and employment growth projected by the regional agency. Assuming reasonable residential and employment densities, localities shall propose an urban growth boundary for inclusion in their general plan that will accommodate this growth and provide necessary environmental protection.
- B. Land that is located beyond urban growth boundaries will be protected for agricultural, rural, recreational, open space and wildlife uses.
- C. The regional agency will be responsible for final acceptance of locally proposed urban growth boundaries.



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## **Policy Four**

**Encourage the provision of housing opportunities for all income levels.**

### **Objectives**

- Ensure ample and diverse labor supply.
- Enable workers to live closer to jobs.
- Improve social welfare.
- Enable public employees such as teachers, health care providers, and safety and public works personnel to live in or close to the communities they serve.

### **Actions**

- A. Cities and counties shall make a strong commitment to improve the supply and affordability of housing in their local plans and programs to accommodate both local and regional needs.
- B. Cities and counties shall develop, and include in their growth management plans and programs, strategies and actions to meet local and regional housing needs.

## **Policy Five**

**Allow for the development of new communities along transit corridors where interurban transit service and capacity are available or committed when they would be consistent with regional or subregional goals and objectives, and not negatively impact existing communities.**

### **Objectives**

- Foster a balance in land uses and services.
- Expand living options for all Bay Area residents.
- Utilize transit to its fullest capacity.
- Preserve open space and agricultural land.
- Provide compact and efficient new communities.

### **Actions**

- A. Counties can designate in their general plans, and regional agencies shall assign priority to, areas appropriate for new community development.
- B. New communities shall provide residents with the ability to live, work and shop within their boundaries.
- C. All public agencies shall ensure that new communities include a full range of services, such as water, sewer, public safety, transportation, schools and recreation.

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## Governance

The success of any effort to improve policy development, decision-making and conflict resolution for issues of regional significance depends on restructuring the existing form of regional governance. Three alternative methods have been identified. These are:

### **1. State-directed policy making**

The State legislature during the past year has renewed its efforts to provide state oversight of local planning efforts. In this alternative, the state government makes policies for implementation by local and regional governments. The policies can be very directive, as in the siting of a particular facility or determination of specific land uses, or they can be more general, specifying certain performance standards, such as a mix of price levels for housing.

### **2. Locally-directed regional management**

The State passes enabling legislation to permit regional agencies to develop goals and objectives relating to critical regional infrastructure, growth, and environmental issues. Regional agencies have authority to set policies on these matters, and to ensure that local plans and policies are brought into consistency with regional goals and objectives. Local jurisdictions and appropriate special districts must be represented throughout the process and on the governing board of any such agencies.

### **3. Voluntary subregional and regional coordination**

Local jurisdictions and special districts form voluntary coalitions to address subregional and regional issues.

The Association of Bay Area Governments believes that the second alternative offers local jurisdictions the desired balance between local self-determination and effective regional planning for items of regional significance necessary to sustain the quality of life throughout the Bay Area.

This alternative does not require, nor does ABAG advocate, an additional layer of government. Rather, it provides a more efficient and effective approach to regional governance and coordination.



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**F**ull achievement of this policy framework requires action from a variety of jurisdictions. **It is crucial to recognize the need for additional revenue in conjunction with this or any new system. The impact of Proposition 13, costly mandated activities relating to county social, health and justice services, and the need for increased maintenance of existing infrastructure precludes full implementation of the proposed policy framework without new revenue.**

**The state should:**

- A. Initiate changes to the existing property tax system in order to alleviate fiscal constraints and motivations that have influenced local land use decisions.
- B. Either directly provide a new and stable source of funding, or enable regional comprehensive planning agencies to raise revenues to fund comprehensive planning and infrastructure programs.
- C. Establish general goals, objectives and guidance for regional agencies with the participation of local and regional officials while recognizing the diversity among regions.
- D. Allow for the establishment of authority at the regional level to carry out adopted land use policies and actions.
- E. Require special districts, local agency formation commissions (LAFCO's), and regional agencies to coordinate their efforts.
- F. Provide a mechanism for the resolution of disputes between and/or among agencies that avoids costly and lengthy litigation.
- G. Reduce the 2/3 vote requirement for infrastructure bond issues.
- H. Improve flexibility in rules governing tax sharing arrangements between local jurisdictions.
- I. Allow for the withholding of new revenue as well as grant funds to cities, counties and special districts that do not comply with adopted land use policies and actions.
- J. Permit the imposition of a regional impact fee on developments which proceed contrary to adopted land use policies and actions.



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**Regional agencies should:**

- A. Advocate a priority in allocating Federal, State, and special district grants, loans and funds to those communities that adopt regionally, and subregionally, endorsed objectives.
- B. Ensure consistency of all local general plans with adopted land use policies, and state and regional objectives as local plans are amended over time.
- C. Organize and coordinate the development of specific goals and objectives, generally acceptable to the political entities of the Bay Area, which address issues of potential regional significance such as:
  - 1. Economic well-being
  - 2. Population growth and distribution
  - 3. Housing and job production
  - 4. Transportation
  - 5. Public health and human services
  - 6. Environmental quality
  - 7. Public safety
  - 8. Education
  - 9. Scheduling, siting and financing of regional and subregional infrastructure

**Subregional coordination committees should:**

- A. Develop policies and review boards of cities, counties and special districts to resolve matters relating to job-housing balance, the amount and allowable density of needed housing, open space buffers, coordination of infrastructure, and capital needs and responsibilities.
- B. Require mitigation of significant adverse impacts of a plan or project on a neighboring community unless, on a subregional basis, mitigation is deemed infeasible due to overriding social or economic considerations.
- C. Provide for sharing and pooling of local housing funds among neighboring communities.
- D. Develop procedures for improved notification and communication on planning and development issues.

**Local jurisdictions should:**

- A. Coordinate local land use plans with neighboring jurisdictions on a subregional basis.
- B. Ensure local general plans and regionally significant development proposals are consistent with the adopted land use policies and actions.
- C. Participate in interjurisdictional tax sharing agreements in order to reduce the fiscal influences on land use decisions.

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## Afterword

This policy framework is the first step in developing a common vision and consistent approach to regional land use issues. It is intended to assist us in sustaining and improving the Bay Area's quality of life.

## Acknowledgement

*The Proposed Land Use Policy Framework for the San Francisco Bay Area, which was adopted by the Executive Board of the Association of Bay Area Governments on July 26, 1990, was authored by the Regional Planning Committee. Input was requested from all member jurisdictions, whose thoughtful comments and contributions are gratefully acknowledged.*

## Glossary

### **City-centered growth pattern**

Future growth will be accommodated in existing or emerging communities. Each community is centered around a core of activity where commercial, governmental, cultural, recreational, health and educational services are provided. Although new communities may be needed in the future, the greatest emphasis should be directed toward physical and economic growth in existing communities.

### **Job/housing balance**

The coordination of housing and job opportunities which takes into account the availability of transit, as well as land use mix, housing prices, job categories, worker skills and the historical role of a city as a "bedroom community." The primary objective is to reduce auto trips and auto congestion by providing the opportunity for workers to live close to job sites or to transit. This approach can improve regional mobility as well as impart a stronger sense of community.

### **New communities**

Small, planned developments located around fixed or light rail stations in which jobs, housing, shopping, recreation and childcare are condensed, balanced and clustered to maximize land use, and minimize automobile use.

### **Regional infrastructure**

Public facilities and services which extend beyond the boundaries of a few local jurisdictions. Examples include highways, fixed and light-rail public transit, and large-scale sewage and water systems.

### **Tele-commuting**

The ability to move information rather than people between home and work. Home offices or neighborhood work centers can substantially reduce daily long-distance automobile commuting.

### **Transit corridors**

Areas where the predominant method of transportation is fixed rail, light rail or interurban buses. These transit systems should link individual commuters with employment centers.



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